



Robert Parker

Sustainable Suckler Cow Production

Ulster Farmers Union

17<sup>th</sup> November 2016

# Drumdown



- 570ac owned
  - 210 Cows
  - 200 Ewes
- 40ac Spring Barley

# Sustainable?

“Able to be maintained at a certain rate or level”

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What would a sustainable beef industry look like?

# Sustainable?

## Scottish Upland Sucklers Selling Yearling Calves 2016

	Bottom Third	Average	Top Third
Av. Herd size (Head)	108	110	75
Calves Reared / 100cows	82	89	94
Calf Output (£/cow in herd)	706	776	878
Calf Premium	61	63	68
Less Replacements	78	81	69
<b>Net Output/Cow</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>759</b>	<b>878</b>
Total Variable Costs	387	332	305
<b>Gross Margin/Cow</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>573</b>
Fixed Costs	505	464	443
<b>Net Margin/Cow</b>	<b>(-203)</b>	<b>(-38)</b>	<b>129</b>

# Sustainable?

“Stud stock should be reared in an environment equivalent, or tougher than, that in which their progeny are expected to survive in commercially”

*Neil McGowan, NSch 2016*



# Sustainable?

## Bull Sales

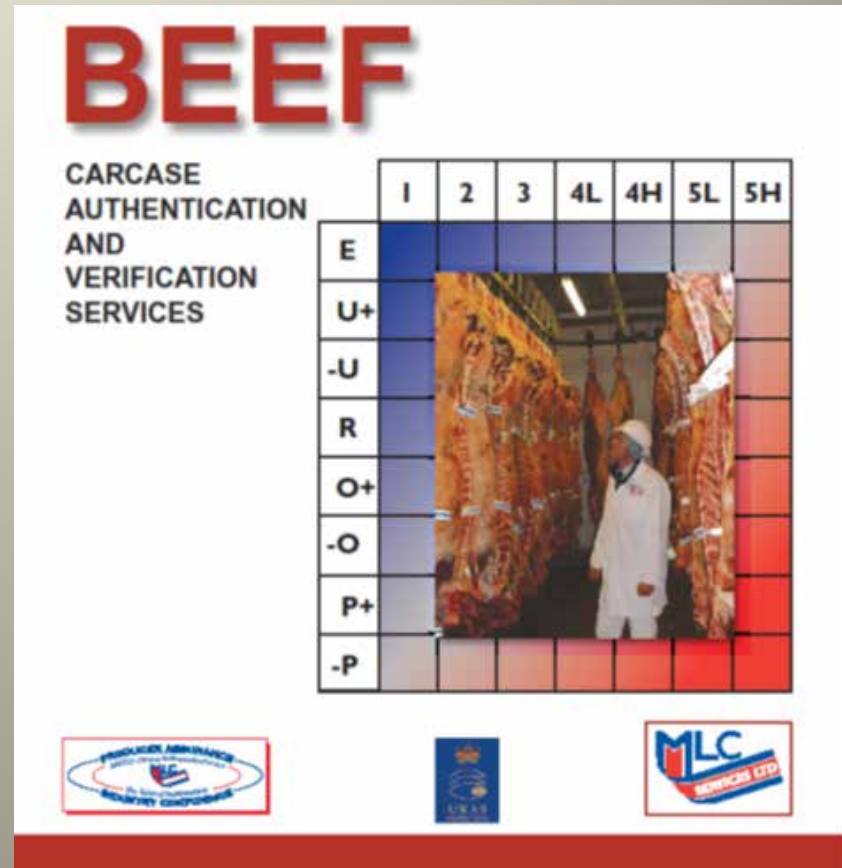
- Industry Showcase
- Fed to show off potential and size
- Sellers Costs
- Feet
- Fertility
- Longevity



# Sustainable?

## The Europ Grid

- Rewards Meat Yield
- No measure of carcass value
- Penalises Fat Cover
- No measure of EQ





# Sustainable?

## Show Ring

- Industry Showcase
- Stockmanship
- Meat yield
- True cost
- Influence
- Eating Quality



# Highland Wagyu





# Highland Wagyu

Wangus Sirloins



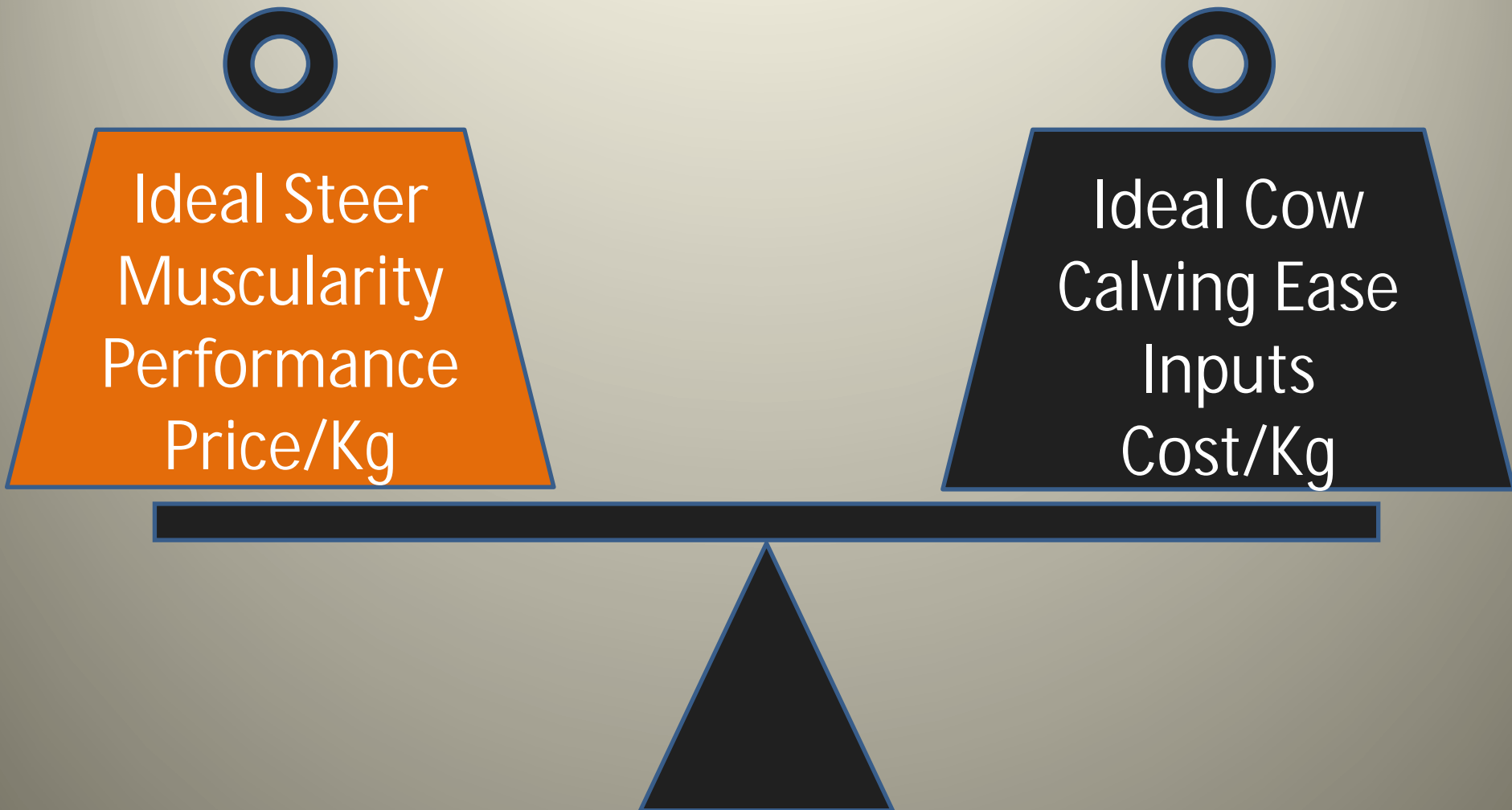
# The Four Main Drivers to Sustainable Beef Production

- The Game Changers
- The Building Blocks
- Getting the Basics Right

# The Four Main Drivers to Profitable Beef Production

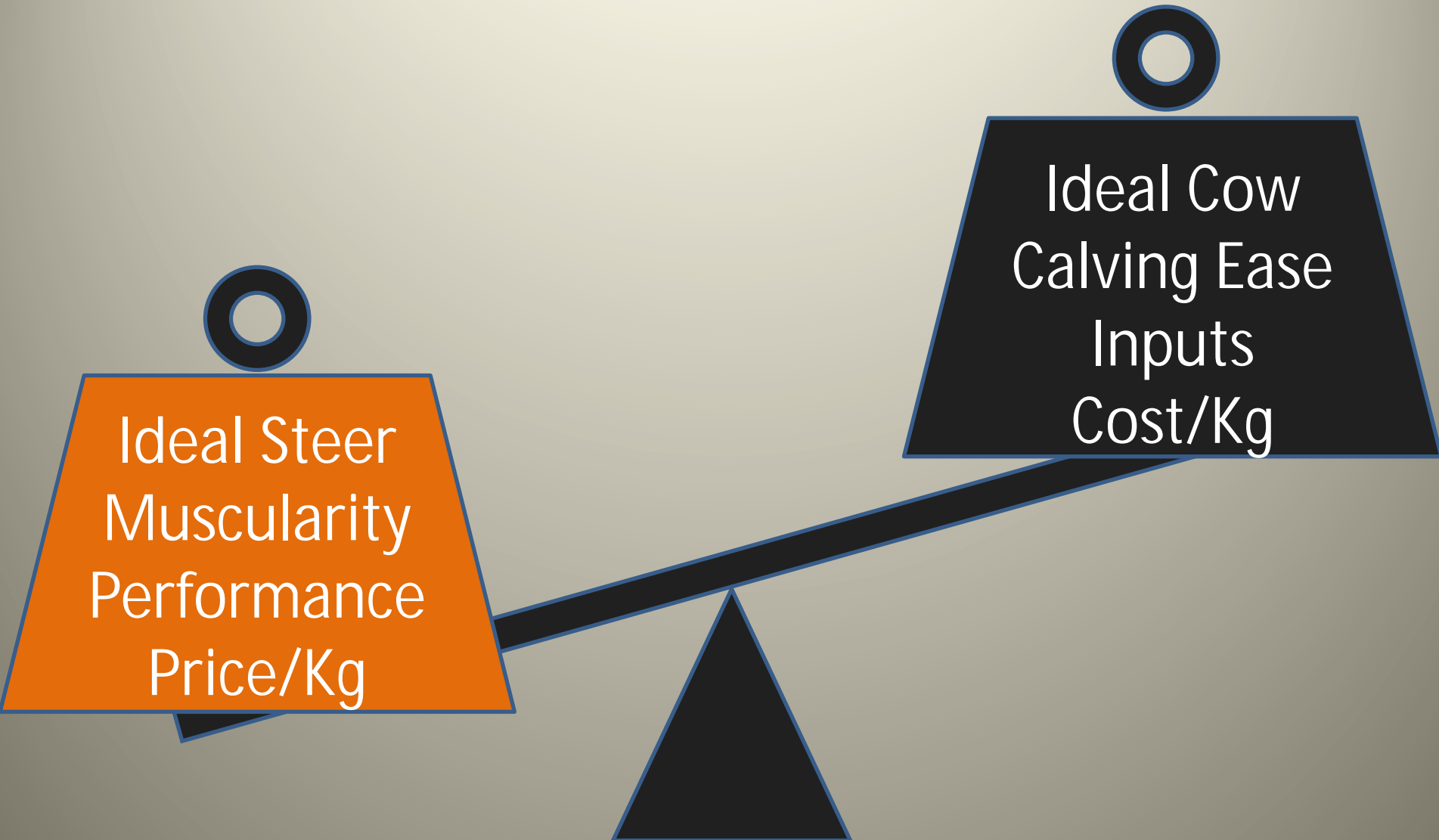
- The Game Changers
- The Building Blocks
- Getting the Basics Right

# 1. Balance





# 1. Balance



## 2. Biosecurity



- Bigger Fences!
- TB / BVD / IBR / Johnes / Leptospirosis / etc..
- Vaccination
- Buy from high health status herds
- Breed your own replacements / closed herd

## 2. Biosecurity

### What is the Ideal Suckler Cow?

- One calf per year
- Calving Ease
- Weaning Weights
- Early Sexual Maturity
- Longevity
- Temperament
- Low Feed Requirement
- Grass Based System



# 2. Biosecurity

## The Closed Herd

### Weaknesses

- Long term decision
- Slow response to market Forces
- Long term impact of “the wrong bull”
- Correct breed choice

### Strengths

- Simplicity
- Only Bulls to buy
- Genetic Control
- Consistency
- Hybrid Vigour

# Hybrid Vigour



- Up to 10% extra growth rate on first cross
- Increased fertility
- Increased maternal ability



# Closed Herd

B Breed  
Bull

The diagram illustrates a 'Closed Herd' rotational cross system. It features two circular herds: 'Herd 1 Breed A' (orange) on the left and 'Herd 2 Breed B' (dark blue) on the right. Above Herd 1 is a dark blue arrow pointing down labeled 'B Breed Bull'. Below Herd 2 is an orange arrow pointing up labeled 'A Breed Bull'. Between the herds are two horizontal arrows: an orange arrow pointing left labeled 'Replacements' and a dark blue arrow pointing right labeled 'Replacements'.

Herd 1  
Breed A

Replacements

Herd 2  
Breed B

Replacements

A Breed  
Bull

Rotational Cross With 2 Groups

- Needs balance between the two breeds
- Focus on maternal traits



# 3. Calving Percentage

- More calves to sell
- Focus on easy calving bulls....and cows!
- More cows back in calf
- Cows last longer
- Less labour and vet bills



# The Cost of Bad Calvings

Calving Score	Calving Costs	Cost on Subsequent Performance	Total£/Cow Calving
1	0	0	0
2	£5	9	14
3	£15	76	91
4	£190	115	305
5	£365	407	772

Source: Basil Lowman SRUC



## 4. Calving Pattern

# Drumdow 2000





# Drumdown Monitor Farm

## 2004 - 2007





# Drumdown 2004





# Maximising Suckler Cow Profitability Using British Native Breeds

A Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust Report  
by  
Robert Parker

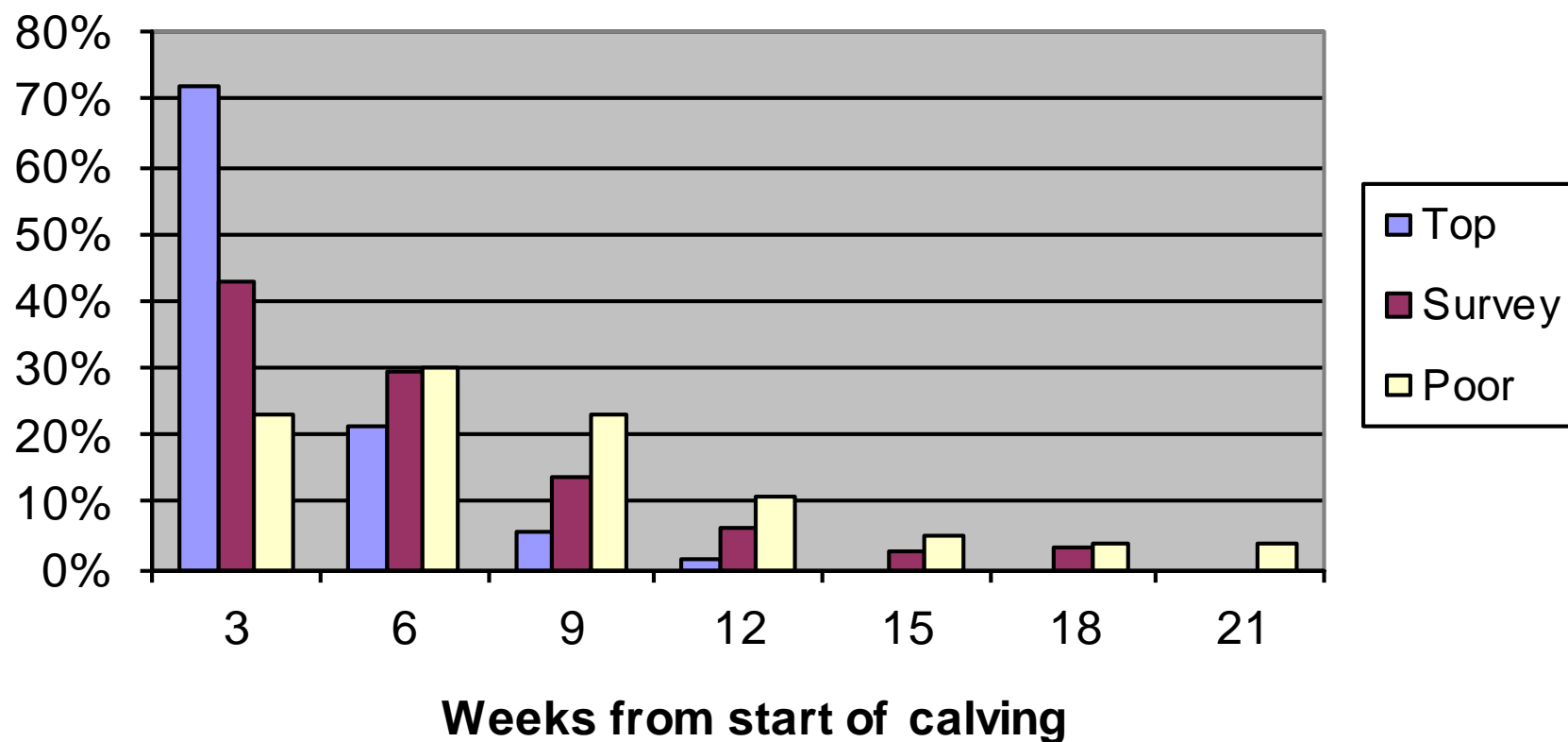
Sponsored by  
The Hereford Cattle Society  
2006



# Drumdown 2007

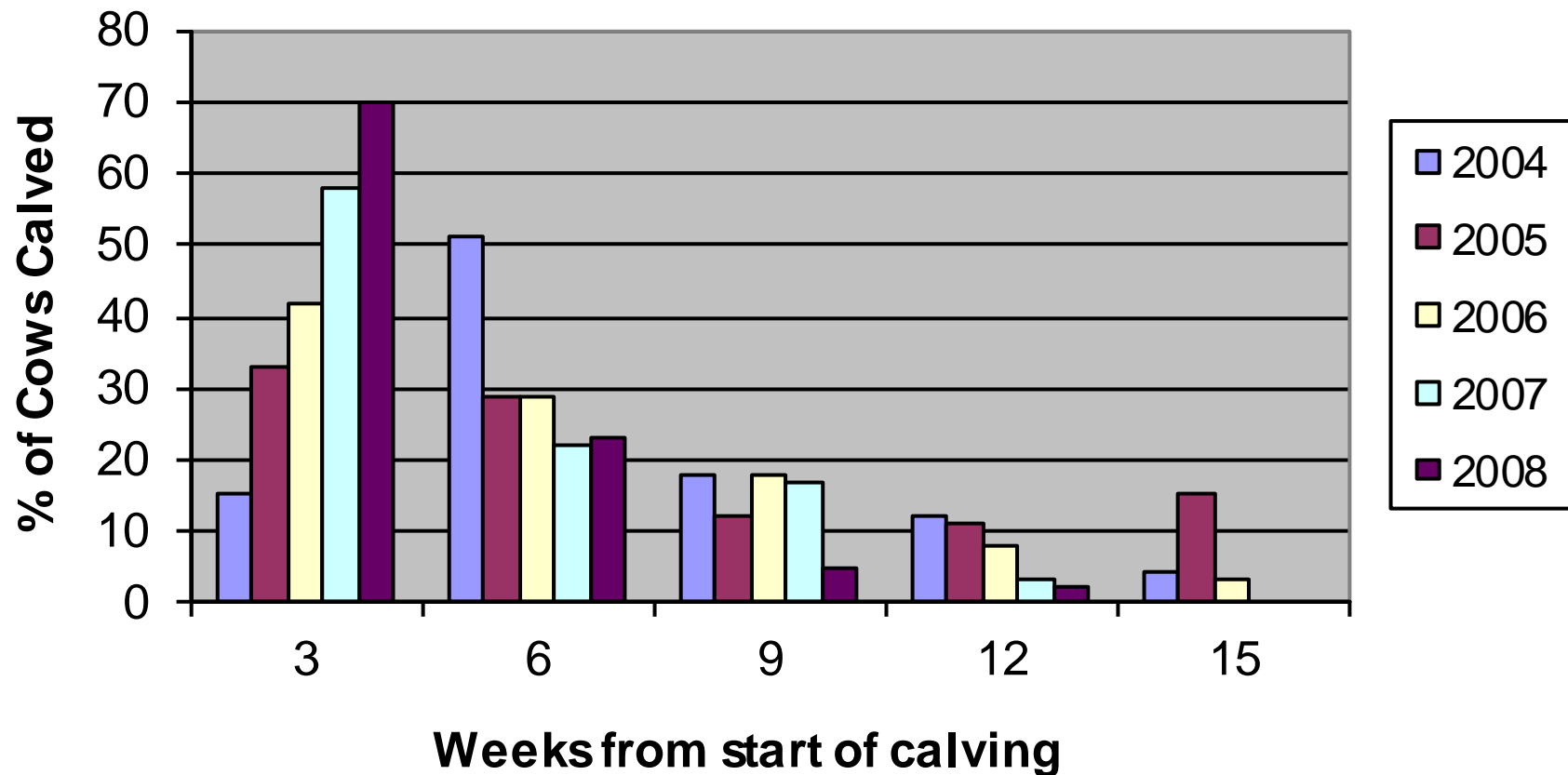


# UK Calving Patterns



# Drumdown Calving Pattern

## 2004 - 2008



# Steer Sales at Drumdow

## Yearling steers

Breed Of Calf	Date Calf Sold	Average Age at Sale
Continental Cross	7 <sup>th</sup> April 2000	317
Native Cross	3 <sup>rd</sup> April 2016	348

# Steer Sales at Drumdow

## Yearling steers

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# Steer Sales at Drumdow

## Yearling steers

Breed Of Calf	Date Calf Sold	Average Age at Sale	LWT (Kg)	Wt. Calves Sold /100 Cows
Continental Cross	7 <sup>th</sup> April 2000	317	378	30.99T (82% weaning)
Native Cross	3 <sup>rd</sup> April 2016	348	410	38.54T (94% weaning)

# Drumdown 2016





# Drumdow 2016





# Drumdown 2016



# Simplicity

- < %5 intervention
- < %4 Not in Calf
- 10 week calving period (Bulls in for 9 Weeks)
- <15% replacements
- 20% less winter feed
- Easy to Work With
- Easy Breeding Plan
- Brutal on Culling





# Consistency





# The Four Drivers to Sustainable / Profitable Beef Production

1. Balance
2. Biosecurity
3. Calving Percentage
4. Calving Pattern



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